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Item 3 (a) (ii) of the provisional agenda*
Follow-up to the World Summit for Social Development: priority theme: initiation of the overall review of the implementation of the outcome of the Summit

Statement submitted by the following non-governmental organizations in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council: Greek Orthodox Archdiocesan Council of North and South America; HelpAge International; International Council of Women; International Federation of Business and Professional Women; Soroptimist International; Zonta International (general); All India Women's Conference; Associated Country Women of the World; Caritas Internationalis; Foundation for the Rights of the Family (PRODEFA); International Catholic Child Bureau; International Confederation of Christian Family Movements; International Council of Jewish Women; International Council of Psychologists; International Federation of University Women; International Kolping Society; Italian Centre of Solidarity; New Humanity; Pax Romana (International Catholic Movement for International and Cultural Affairs) (International Movement of Catholic Students); Salvation Army; SOS-Kinderdorf International; World Association of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts; World Movement of Mothers (special); International Association of Charities; European Union of Women; International Inner Wheel; International Round Table for the Advancement of Counselling (roster)

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is circulated in accordance with paragraphs 30 and 31 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31 of 25 July 1996.

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* E/CN.5/1999/1.

99-01170 (E) 270199

We, the undersigned international non-governmental organizations in consultative status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council,

Recall:

That the Declaration of Human Rights states that "Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family including food, clothing, housing, medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control" (General Assembly resolution 217 A (III) of 10 December 1948, art. 25, para. 1);

That the Declaration on the Right to Development says that "States ... shall ensure, *inter alia*, ... access to basic resources, education, health services, food, housing, employment and the fair distribution of income" (General Assembly resolution 41/128 of 4 December 1986, art. 8, para. 1);

Note that the second preambular paragraph of General Assembly resolution 52/81 of 12 December 1997 recognizes "that the basic objective of the follow-up to the International Year of the Family should be to strengthen and support families in performing their societal and developmental functions and to build upon their strengths, particularly at the national and local levels";

Reaffirm that "ensuring full and equal access to social services, especially education, legal services and health-care services for women of all ages and children, recognizing the rights, duties and responsibilities of parents and other persons legally responsible for children, consistent with the Convention on the Rights of the Child" (E/CN.5/1996/3, para. 24 (c)) is a main goal in meeting the basic human needs of all;

We, therefore,

1. *Consider* that the scourges of unemployment and poverty concern not just individuals but also their families as well as their communities and have an impact on the participation of families in social development;

2. *Consider further* that all social groups and all families, particularly the weakest and most vulnerable, should have full and equal access to basic social services, including counselling, without discrimination;

3. *Emphasize* that the role of families is crucial in providing such services as, *inter alia*, nurturing, education, health care, nutrition, clothing, housing, care of frail elderly and/or disabled members, as well as in ensuring intergenerational exchange and support;

4. *Request* increasing acknowledgement that families need enabling environments and subsidiary social services so that they may fully perform their functions;

5. *Request also* that families be recognized for their central role in community development and that they be resourced and empowered as active participants in social and economic development. This should also allow for the compatibility of employment and family life;

6. *Urge* recognition of the strengths of the individual family in the provision and perspective of services and build upon such strengths to meet family needs in the different stages of the life-cycle of families;

7. *Urge* reconsideration of the basis for access to social services in view of increasingly flexible and insecure employment in a world that tends to ascribe more value to economic activities than to other forms of social participation;

8. *Recommend* the upgrading and/or provision of basic training and schooling for voluntary and unpaid work beyond the family context;

9. *Stress* the need to enhance the cultural participation of families and their economic and social role with respect to the creativity of all, including ethnic minorities;

10. *Urge* for the sake of family stability, the building up of an education for family life that covers the entire lifespan, starting with primary education. The collaboration of the media in this is of utmost importance and should be actively pursued;

11. *Call for* the implementation of cooperation, cross-sectoral networking at all levels of social services, be it family care, external voluntary services or institutionalized social services in a network with as much organizational structure as appropriate;

12. *Welcome* the decision of the General Assembly to hold a special session on the implementation of the outcome of the World Summit for Social Development and further initiatives in the year 2000;

13. *Suggest* as one of the objectives of the follow-up to the Copenhagen World Summit for Social Development that a family dimension be included in developmental strategies and policies in all sectors, so as to ensure that appropriate consideration is given to the impact of such strategies and policies on the family and also to that of the family's influence on them.

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Follow-up to the World Summit for Social Development: review of relevant United Nations plans and programmes of action pertaining to the situation of social groups

Statement submitted by the International Federation on Ageing, a non-governmental organization in general consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is circulated in accordance with paragraphs 30 and 31 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31 of 25 July 1996.

* * *

One of the most challenging demographic trends of the twenty-first century is the growth of the global older population, citizens who are living longer, productive lives. A steady stream of one million persons now crosses the threshold of age 60 every month and 80 per cent of them are in developing countries. By the year 2001, the total number of those aged 60 and above is projected to reach 600 million and go on to reach 1.2 billion by the year 2025. At that time, over 70 per cent of older persons will be living in what are today's developing countries. This demographic revolution will affect the social and economic structures in all societies.

In this 1999 International Year of Older Persons, the Secretary-General has urged that the United Nations Principles for Older Persons (DPI/1261/Rev.1) be widely disseminated and acted upon. These Principles encompass issues of independence, participation, care, self-fulfilment and dignity. For all Governments and civil societies, the foremost challenge lies in identifying and supporting new opportunities for older persons and the benefits for society that arise from viewing older persons as a resource rather than a burden. Older persons have self-reliance and the potential for making contributions to their families and communities and, by means of these contributions, for improving the quality of life for all

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in a sustainable manner. To fulfil this potential, older persons must have access to adequate resources to meet basic needs and must be incorporated into decision-making processes.

Responding to this challenge would ensure implementation of commitment 4 of the Copenhagen Declaration on Social Development, which specifically refers to the promotion of social integration by fostering those activities that provide for the full participation of all generations in society. The International Federation on Ageing, with the support of the NGO Committee on Ageing, therefore proposes the following actions to enable persons in their higher years to have full partnership in their communities and in society:

(a) Recognizing that older persons are a valuable and productive resource in every society, Governments and civil society should invest in their elderly. Older persons possess a wealth of knowledge, skills, diverse cultural heritages and life-long experiences which must be utilized to enable societies to accommodate to the unprecedented population shift referred to above. The substantive contributions of older persons taking on responsibilities in their communities and in society can only benefit social development;

(b) Older persons need adequate resources to meet basic needs — namely, accessible health and social services, shelter, adequate income and employment opportunities, including retraining, second careers, and recognition of the value of unpaid as well as paid work, and inclusion in decision-making processes;

(c) Human rights and respect for every person's dignity must be upheld to the very end of the life cycle. Efforts must be directed towards countering negative attitudes and myths regarding ageing, which still persist globally.

The International Federation on Ageing looks to the Commission for Social Development to promote social integration, which, by its very nature implies the full participation and partnership of all generations in "A society for all ages". This theme of the 1999 International Year of Older Persons provides a unique opportunity for Governments and civil society to measure progress in moving towards the objectives stated above.

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Follow-up to the World Summit for Social Development: priority theme: initiation of the overall review of the implementation of the outcome of the Summit

Statement submitted by the Foundation for the Rights of the Family (PRODEFA), a non-governmental organization in special consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is circulated in accordance with paragraphs 30 and 31 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31 of 25 July 1996.

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In his 1995 annual report on the work of the Organization, the Secretary-General of the United Nations referred to the importance of supporting families as an integral part of the efforts to achieve peace, human rights, democracy, sustainable development and social progress.

The seven conferences of the 1990s** enunciate the importance of the family for the growth and well-being of all its members, particularly children and youth, or identify objectives and actions of direct relevance to the family; they also point out the positive role that families could play in promoting respect, learning and practice of basic human rights.

* E/CN.5/1999/1.

** World Summit for Children, New York; United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, Rio de Janeiro; World Conference on Human Rights, Vienna; International Conference on Population and Development, Cairo; World Summit for Social Development, Copenhagen; Fourth World Conference on Women, Beijing; United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II), Istanbul.

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The International Conference on Population and Development in Cairo addresses family issues extensively. Its Programme of Action reaffirms the family as the basic unit of society and contains a full chapter on "The family, its roles, rights, composition and structure".

As to the World Summit for Social Development in Copenhagen, the Conference in which this Commission is directly involved, the Copenhagen Declaration states that the goals and objectives of social development require continuous efforts to reduce and eliminate major sources of social distress and instability for the family and society. Both the Declaration and Programme of Action recognize the central role of the family in social integration and call for fostering policies that address various aspects of family life and promote equal partnership between women and men in the family, community life and society. The Declaration also emphasizes the shared responsibility of men and women in the care of children and in the support for ageing family members, and calls for men's active involvement in responsible parenthood and sexual and reproductive behaviour.

* * *

There is an acute need for making basic social services available to all groups and families, particularly those deprived of what is basically necessary for everyday life.

Because of the great imbalance existing in the world, the concept of social services means one thing for industrialized countries and an altogether different thing for developing or weaker countries, where such basic services as shelter, food, water and urgent medical care are the primary concern.

Utter poverty and man-made and natural disasters — such as the great tragedy in Central America — break up entire families and destroy the social fabric.

The family, being the fullest reflection of the strength and weakness of society, offers a unique approach to social issues.

This is why a correct assessment of the progress made in the implementation of and follow-up to the Copenhagen Declaration and Programme of Action would be incomplete if it did not take into consideration the direct relationship existing between the family and a great number of social problems — poverty, drug addiction, illness, age and unemployment, among others.

A family perspective should also include issues relating to individual family members, inasmuch as the members of the family, considered individually, cannot develop fully if their natural context, the family, is lost sight of.

In its resolution 47/237, the General Assembly recommended various activities to follow up the International Year of the Family, 1994. It was decided that 15 May of every year should be observed as the International Day of Families and that two plenary meetings at its forty-ninth session, in 1994, would be devoted to the implementation of this follow-up. In the same resolution, the Assembly requested the Secretary-General to seek the views of States members of the Commission for Social Development on the desirability of working out a declaration on the role, responsibilities and rights of families on the occasion of the Year.

However, apart from these activities, no other steps have actually been taken towards a follow-up to the International Year of the Family.

Among other possibilities of action, there is a need to fill the now existing void by undertaking serious studies on the family, its functions, responsibilities, rights, forms and structures.

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Follow-up to the World Summit for Social Development: review of relevant United Nations plans and programmes of action pertaining to the situation of social groups

Statement submitted by the American Association of Retired Persons, a non-governmental organization in general consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is circulated in accordance with paragraphs 30 and 31 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31 of 25 July 1996.

* * *

The American Association of Retired Persons (AARP) appreciates the opportunity to participate in the thirty-seventh session of the Commission for Social Development and to speak on behalf of older persons worldwide. AARP is a non-governmental organization in general consultative status with the Economic and Social Council, with a membership of 32 million persons.

Our comments today focus on the follow-up to the World Summit for Social Development and the recognition of each individual's rights in their society. Paragraph 66 of the Programme of Action of the World Summit for Social Development describes the aim of social integration as creating a society for all, "in which every individual, each with rights and responsibilities, has an active role to play. Such an inclusive society must be based on respect for all human rights and fundamental freedoms, cultural and religious diversity, social justice and the special needs of vulnerable and disadvantaged groups, democratic participation and the rule of law. The pluralistic nature of most societies has at times resulted in problems for the different groups to achieve and maintain harmony and cooperation, and to have equal access to all resources in society. Full recognition of each individual's rights in the context of the rule of law has not always been fully guaranteed. Since the founding

* E/CN.5/1999/1.

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of the United Nations, this quest for humane, stable, safe, tolerant and just societies has shown a mixed record at best".

In support of this aim, and in recognition of every individual's rights, AARP is pleased to present a compilation of writing from older persons around the world on the subject of human rights.* It was initiated to celebrate the dual occurrences of the fiftieth anniversary of the Declaration of Human Rights, and the 1999 International Year of Older Persons. We offer it to the Commission for Social Development on behalf of older persons worldwide in the spirit of promoting the principle of caring for one another's well-being and fostering the spirit of mutual support, within with context of human rights education (Programme of Action of the World Summit for Social Development, para. 70).

The writings were selected from over 400 participants in a global postcard campaign among older persons, eliciting their views on the meaning of human rights, particularly from the vantage point of late life. The photographs on the postcards correspond to the United Nations Principles for Older Persons and were chosen to illustrate that, in a society for all ages, older persons have human rights the same as all other age groups.

Individuals from over 40 countries participated, returning the postcards in their own handwriting and language. The responses range from random thoughts and introspection, to poetry and solemn prose. Some persons were light-hearted and pleased to participate, some expressed hopelessness and despair, and others assembled extraordinary packages of personal pictures, essays, gift books, cards and posters. Only a small number of the postcards could be included in this booklet, but efforts to exhibit all of the postcards more widely will be made throughout the International Year of Older Persons.

The lead agency on this project was AARP, working in collaboration with the United Nations programme on ageing, and with the participation of several project partners, including Coalition 99, HelpAge International, the Geneva International Network on Ageing (GINA), the NGO Committees on Ageing in Vienna and in New York, the International Movement ATD Fourth World, and regional and local programmes of AARP.

We urge Governments to promote and protect all human rights and fundamental freedoms for persons of all ages, including the right to development, bearing in mind the interdependent and mutually reinforcing relationship between democracy, development and respect for human rights (para. 71, Programme of Action of the World Summit for Social Development), and to join us in speaking out on behalf of ageing.

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* Available in the files of the Secretariat.

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Follow-up to the World Summit for Social Development: priority theme: social services for all

Statement submitted by the International Association of Schools of Social Work, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is circulated in accordance with paragraphs 30 and 31 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31 of 25 July 1996.

* * *

The International Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW) represents 1,700 schools of social work in 100 countries that collectively educate the vast number of social workers needed to meet the social service challenges of the twenty-first century. Even countries that have never supported social work education in the past, today recognize its importance to the advancement of their people and are engaged in developing undergraduate and master's level social work programmes.

IASSW enthusiastically applauds the emphasis of the Administrative Committee on Coordination on social services as essential to life, and endorses the six basic social services for all that emerged from the World Summit for Social Development's Programme of Action: (1) population (with special emphasis on reproductive health and family planning services); (2) primary "preventive and curative" health care (which we maintain should be defined as both physical and mental health care); (3) nutrition; (4) basic education; (5) drinking water and sanitation; and (6) shelter. When countries are pressed economically, social conditions predictably deteriorate. Therefore, we urge member States to enhance such services.

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Social workers are uniquely educated to provide comprehensive social services to individuals, groups, families, organizations and communities in both rural and urban areas. The problems of those who suffer from poverty, violence, discrimination, and other social injustices are challenges that social workers are trained to address. The IASSW urges Governments to provide resources for innovations in social work research and education to ensure that social workers in all countries have up-to-date training in international social development and services.

When planning and implementing effective social services, IASSW emphasizes the importance of addressing the needs of those most likely to experience the problem being addressed now, as well as those populations in which the problem is increasing most rapidly. The promotion of "preventive and curative health care", therefore, must target the populations at highest risk, that is, women, children, the elderly, refugees and minorities.

Supporting the United Nations concept of gathering gender-specific information, called "gender mainstreaming" is key to understanding the social service needs of all people. Physical and mental health problems are derived largely from violence, poverty and cultural subservience. Health and welfare needs often are polarized with few resources to support systems of community-based care, and those that exist are often considered unresponsive to gender-specific cultural differences. We urge Governments to provide resources to educate social workers for gender-specific culturally relevant community-based services, as well as evaluative studies that address critical social conditions from a human rights perspective.

Social work by definition is an interdisciplinary profession that educates its members to work collaboratively, honouring other disciplines and working with people from all walks of life. We urge member States to provide funds to further the social work professions' interdisciplinary functioning in the interest of developing community-based infrastructures for comprehensive, effective social services for all.

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Statement submitted by Pax Christi International, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is circulated in accordance with paragraphs 30 and 31 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31 of 25 July 1996.

* * *

Human rights and development

Rights must always be seen in relationship to responsibilities, and also in relationship to needs. Unless this triad is kept clearly in mind, rights language and analysis can separate rather than unite those who are working for development.

For example, the right to life is correlative with the responsibility to preserve it and with the need for adequate resources, directly from the fruit of one's own labour, through a living wage, or from the allotment of necessary means through some social mechanism of the community. Likewise, the right to a decent standard of living is correlative with the responsibility to live in a becoming manner, and with the need for a physical and social environment that fosters a way of life in which people can experience their continuing personal development. This environment should include the opportunity to serve the common good, for all persons are social by nature, and cannot reach their potential unless they invest in the good of all. Today we are coming to realize that the concern for the common good includes care for the biosphere itself, of which we are a part.

* E/CN.5/1999/1.

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Government has an essential role to play here, to promote the common good of society by seeing to it that basic human needs are met, that responsibilities are carried out, and that rights are respected.

Integrating human rights and development. Human rights are moral claims to whatever a person or a group needs in order to protect and develop life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. These rights become legal and political when they are expressed in constitutional law. Most rights are not absolute because they exist in conflict with others' rights. It is precisely in adjudicating conflicting claims to rights that there is need for ethical norms or guidelines that can be accepted across cultures.

We believe that the following two principles provide such norms:

1. The needs of the poor take priority over the wants of the rich.

2. The right of all members of a society to participate in decision-making that affects them takes priority over the ability of privileged individuals or groups to exclude them.

These principles provide the basis for practices that integrate human rights and development. Local, national and international policies should aim first and directly at satisfying the subsistence needs of all members of the society. These subsistence needs are food, clothing, housing, basic education and basic health care. At the same time, care must be taken not to violate transcendence needs, such as freedom of assembly, speech, religion, press, and the opportunity to participate in decision-making at all levels of society. Only secondarily should policies aim at fostering availability of goods and services beyond subsistence needs. Prioritizing policies in this way allows for growth but also for balance and for care for the physical environment. These principles provide an analytic tool for judging economic practices of both the public and private sectors.

Development and peace. The intrinsic relationship between development and peace becomes clear when we recognize that there are three closely related pressures against peace: (1) ecological degradation caused by mismanagement of natural resources; (2) arms proliferation and use, whether by State-controlled armies or terrorists, and the threat of use of chemical and biological weaponry; and (3) prolonged systemic poverty. Adequate development policy must take into account the cause and effect relationship among these three factors.

In regard to systemic poverty, it must be acknowledged that enormous wealth and crippling poverty measured in disease, stunted lives and early death, do not exist side by side without any connection. In fact, the labour of poor people produces the wealth to which these same poor people, in many cases, do not have access. There cannot be an adequate distribution of wealth if there is only a minimum standard of living but no maximum standard of living in a society. Tolerance for unlimited wealth is destructive of the fabric of any society. Until this is acknowledged, many of the efforts to restructure economies in the direction of justice will fail because they do not face a major factor in the so-called "poverty problem". The problem of poverty is also a problem of unbridled quantitative growth.

The report of the United Nations Working Group on the Right to Development (E/CN.4/1995/11 of 5 September 1994) recognized this by calling into question much of the conventional wisdom about development:

> "Since the right to development implies an integrated approach to political, social, economic and cultural rights as a whole, care should be taken to avoid dissociating the economic and monetary aspects of development from its social aspects

and to enhance the dialogue between international social and humanitarian agencies and international institutions responsible for financial and trade questions" (para. 88).

In its conclusions the report further notes:

> "The economic aspects of development seem to receive preference from funding bodies and donors over social aspects. Development assistance is not apportioned among specialized international agencies according to objective criteria related to the basic needs of individuals and population groups; the requirements of growth, production and productivity seem to win out over considerations that would make the human person 'the central subject of development' as called for in article 2 of the [1986] Declaration on the Right to Development" (para. 93).

Recognizing that the globalization of the economy "seems to be the most important change of our era", the final paragraph of the report has more relevance today than when it was written four year ago:

> "The increasingly clear consequences of this globalization of the economy are a reduction in States' room to manoeuvre and the ever more relative nature of their influence on the enjoyment of the right to development. At the same time, international cooperation seems more and more essential to the universal enjoyment of this right. The corollary to the globalization of the economy, then, is a strengthening of solid, productive international fellow-feeling: otherwise the application of the Declaration on the Right to Development will be, if not a vain, then at least an inadequate exercise" (para. 94).

Pax Christi affirms these conclusions. In keeping with its character as a peace movement that works for peace as the fruit of justice, our organization offers the following observations:

1. The "international fellow-feeling" recognized as essential to overcoming the pressures against integral human development must be especially sensitive to the effect of maldevelopment on children, who are at once humanity's most precious inheritance and most vulnerable members. Children have the same human rights as adults. The treatment of children is the clearest indicator or respect for, or disregard of, human rights in practice.

The right to development must address directly the violation of children through their involvement in war as soldiers and victims, their degradation through sexual exploitation, and their deformation through exploitative child labour practices. Finally, the existence of large numbers of street children and of child refugees and internally displaced children, many of them separated from their families, stands as an indictment against all those who allow these conditions to go unchecked.

2. Pax Christi calls attention particularly to several factors which contribute to the destruction of children's potential for development. First, there is small hope for the integral human development of children, or of adults, unless and until questions of development are treated in their moral dimensions. Economic and political policies and practices should be evaluated first as to their direct impact on poor and vulnerable persons, and only then by their effect on economic growth measured quantitatively.

Second, integrating human rights with the right to development requires that more attention be given to the need for fostering domestic-led economic strategies over export-led strategies. The assumption that what is good for trade is good for people needs to be called into question. A good place to begin is to examine the impact of the arms trade on issues of development. Just as the international community is coming to accept the fact that the export of tobacco has a negative impact on the health of an importing country, so, too, we

need to recognize that the export of weaponry, legally or illegally, is death-dealing. Any financial profit from this trade is realized at the price of human misery.

Third, as the millennium draws to a close, and our interdependent human race is under the increased threat of terrorism, it is time to face up to the interconnectedness of all forms of weaponry: nuclear, conventional, biological and chemical. Technical genius applied to military strategy and tactics has produced an untenable result. Perhaps the time is coming when humankind will recognize that the attempt to find or establish peace through war and the threat of war has brought us to the threshold of understanding the futility of war, the threat of war and the preparation for war.

3. Pax Christi therefore urges that all efforts at integrating work for human rights and development should make creative use of the International Decade for a Culture of Peace and Non-violence for the Children of the World, proclaimed by the United Nations General Assembly on 10 November 1998. We urge education on the links between human rights and development as a component of a culture of peace and non-violence.

4. Finally, Pax Christi urges that the momentum against the scourge of landmines developed within the past few years not be allowed to wane. The international treaty against landmines needs to be complemented by concrete programmes for landmine removal and ongoing rehabilitation of landmine victims, and of the victims of other kinds of weapons. Perhaps the efforts towards the development that have elicited so much human investment with less than adequate results can be attributed to a simple flaw, namely, the failure to respect the rights of victims, be they the victims of war or of other injustices.

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Statement submitted by Pax Romana, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is circulated in accordance with paragraphs 30 and 31 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31 of 25 July 1996.

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A jubilee is described in the Bible as a time to free slaves, return land to its rightful owners, and to forgive debts. Taking into account the heavy external debt of the most impoverished countries, this Jubilee Year 2000 is an appropriate time for a new beginning, an opportunity for more justice and the cancellation of the unpayable external debt of the heavily indebted poor countries.

Catholic social teaching assesses public policy, such as international debt, by the criteria of human dignity and social justice. United Nations data and research suggest that such criteria have economic merit. Low income inequality and human development investments tend to contribute to long-term economic growth *(Human Development Report, 1996)*.

Most heavily indebted poor African countries, according to the *Human Development Report, 1997*, pay more to service their debt than they would need to achieve major progress against malnutrition, preventable disease, illiteracy and child mortality before the year 2000.

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The Asian and Russian financial crises this past year, the volatility in Wall Street markets this past fall, and the natural disaster in Central America have created a context where creditor and debtor nations have a growing common interest in strengthening financial stability and boosting human development by cancelling the debt of the poorest nations.

An effective solution addressing the interests of debtor and creditor, meeting moral criteria and improving long-term economic performance is to cancel the debt of the poorest nations and require that funds currently servicing debt be invested in human development.

Short- and long-term benefits accrue to both debtor and creditor. Debtor nations benefit in the short term because they can alleviate poverty and in the long term because they can create the preconditions for socially sustainable growth. Creditor nations benefit in the short term because money can be redirected from servicing debt to purchasing goods, boosting world demand and stabilizing currencies. They benefit in the long term by creating the conditions for growth in their exports because growing economies can afford to import.

We urge the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, regional development banks, bilateral agencies and international private banks to recognize their common interest with poor nations by doing the following:

(a) Cancel the unpayable debt by the year 2000;

(b) Improve the Heavily Indebted Poor Country Debt Initiative by providing debt relief before the year 2000, broadening eligibility to include more countries, consulting civil society on conditions for relief and redefining debt sustainability. Debt sustainability should be defined so that countries can not only meet payments, but maintain social infrastructure, basic human needs and productive activities;

(c) Link debt cancellation with investment in human development.

Co-sponsored by Caritas Internationalis, Franciscans International, the International Committee of Catholic Nurses and Medico-Social Assistants and the International Federation of Catholic Medical Associations.

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Statement submitted by the International Movement ATD Fourth World, a non-governmental organization in general consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

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1) Social Services for All

In preparation for this session of the Commission an Expert Workshop was held on "Innovations in the Delivery and Financing of Social Services." The report of this workshop rightly puts its finger on one of the major challenges in ensuring that services provided do in fact reach those most in need of them in a way properly adapted to their needs:

> *"[T]he notion of the 'passive recipient' should be transformed into that of an 'active participant' who defines the service in accordance to perceived social needs, evaluates its efficiency, provides ideas to improve its quality, and makes sure that the user feedback provided is taken into account. [...] [E]xperience has shown that educated and politically conscious rural people can ensure through local agitation that the rural clinics run properly in their villages, while empty clinics still prevail in other places where the general population is neither so educated nor politically conscious."* (Paragraphs 26-27)
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> *"Some users cannot speak for themselves. The very young, and sometimes the ill and older persons, are examples of such users. They are users who should not be forgotten. Groups of volunteers should reach out to these groups to bring them into the system."* (Paragraph 37)

There are still other people who are not ready to speak for themselves. Adults who have been wounded by conditions of absolute poverty all their lives have rarely been given reason to believe that anyone would ever value their thoughts. Nor have they often had the opportunity to think calmly, without being hemmed in by issues of survival, or to enter into a respectful exchange of thoughts with their peers, in order to make a contribution to the shaping of social services, or any other debates taking place in their communities. Many conditions are necessary in order to change this situation, and to work in partnership with these adults.

The Expert Workshop Report names certain conditions, such as fostering democracy, involving community leaders, safe-guarding against "diverting benefits to the wrong people," and by valuing the contribution of the poor. These efforts are all important, but they are not sufficient. In many countries, all these conditions are met - and yet certain families can remain for generations completely marginalized, and sometimes hurt by social services intended specifically to benefit them. There are still other conditions necessary for fruitful partnership with the poorest. These conditions have been set out both by UNICEF and by France in ways that deserve the attention of this Commission.

UNICEF, in a study co-authored with ATD Fourth World[1], began with the principle that a human rights-based approach to any programming means that it is essential to reach each and every human being. This does not mean developing separate programs to target the poorest, which would serve only to stigmatize them further. It does mean however that, by starting and designing a given project with those least likely to be included in any development efforts, there is a much greater chance of creating a project that will reach, and be of use to all. To cite one example from this study, a project was planned to fight early childhood malnutrition in Guatemala. The first step was getting to know and gradually creating opportunities to think together with families whose existence in the district was almost completely hidden from view, and who had enormous difficulties protecting the survival of their children. It was these families who made it clear that it would be impossible for a project focused on malnutrition to work for them. They bore too heavy a burden of shame and guilt for having watched some of their children die. The project they designed focused instead on their hopes for their children, by emphasizing early childhood education and cultural development. Through this project, they were also able to address

[1] *Reaching the Poorest*, being published in January 1999.

malnutrition; and malnutrition proceeded to decline in this district.

In the case of France, a pioneering "framework law" on eradicating poverty was adopted on 9 July 1998. This law lays out an overarching strategy for fighting poverty in every domain, from social services to tourism to culture. Future laws will have to follow this framework. The most innovative aspect of this law is that for the ten years it has been in the making, some of France's very poorest and most disadvantaged citizens have had the opportunity to collaborate on shaping it, through extensive participation by civil society organizations.

One last point must be raised on the issue of social services for all. The Expert Workshop Report states that "parents generally should be considered as the primary caretakers and their inputs on child rearing should be weighted heavily in decision making." (Paragraph 30) This cannot be stressed enough in an era when children in wealthy countries are routinely denied the right to be raised by their own parents for no cause other than their extreme poverty. In 1996, a mother from a northern European country met with officials to question why she had for the past ten years been denied the right to so much as visit her son - all while being allowed to raise her daughter. The son had been taken into foster care at a time when the mother was having extreme difficulty making ends meet. Because her daughter was born when she was scraping by a little better, no one questioned her ability to love and raise her - and yet it was considered too late for her to have any claim left to her son. Her question remains unanswered.

It is unconscionable that it has long been routine in North America and Western Europe for the poorest parents to have their every action determined by the threat of their children being taken into foster care - even if this means that they are driven to live in hiding, avoiding any use of even the most essential health or education services so that they can preserve their bonds of love with their children.

2) Preparing the Review of the Implementation of the Outcome of the World Summit on Social Development

We join many States and civil society organizations in regretting that there is as yet no agreement on any participation of non-governmental organizations either in the second Preparatory Committee, or in the Special Session of the General Assembly itself. It is positive that some kind of participation will be part of the first Preparatory Committee. However, more is necessary, given that implementation of the commitments made in Copenhagen continues to hinge in significant ways on the expertise and resources of civil society.

A) Microfinance. Concerning the content of this review, microfinance initiatives will certainly be part of the agenda. The Report of the Secretary General on the Role of Microcredit in the Eradication of Poverty (A/53/223) is a valuable contribution on this subject. This report is frank about the limits of microcredit in reaching the very poorest. For this very reason, it was derided in an "Aide-Memoire" that was circulated anonymously in the Second Committee of the General Assembly last fall. Although the UNDP has since seconded some of the Secretary General's reservations about microcredit[2], a great deal remains to be said.

The Secretary General's report states:

"[T]he poorest of the poor are usually not in a position to undertake an economic activity, partly because they lack business skills and even the motivation for business." (Paragraph 13)

This disturbs the authors of the "Aide-Memoire", who write,

"To portray the poor as lacking motivation to take on economic activity [...] goes against the pronouncement of the recent major global conferences that placed confidence in the people living in poverty as having been intrinsically capable of working their way out of the poverty trap when presented with the right opportunities."

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[2] *"Access to savings is often more important than credit for the poorest, who often cannot assume the risk of becoming indebted. [...] [M]icrofinance is not a magic wand for poverty eradication. [...] Successful micro-businesses require people with some entrepreneurial ability. But with little or nothing to fall back on, the poor can be reluctant to strike out in new directions." Overcoming Human Poverty*, UNDP, October 1998, p. 34.

It is indeed true that every human being deserves our collective confidence in their ability to contribute to the advancement of the human race. However certain nuances are being ignored. It is significant that, while the Secretary-General referred to the poorest of the poor, the "Aide-Memoire" speaks only generally of "the poor", a vast and diverse group, with immense and easily tapped potential for entrepreneurship. But when we take the time required - years, and sometimes decades, to build mutual trust with some of the very poorest people in both developing and industrialized countries - it becomes clear just how unwieldy are the obstacles keeping them even from surviving with any semblance of dignity, let alone being prepared to benefit from the possibility of doing business with neighbors who mistrust them - and exposing themselves to great debt. They may indeed be motivated, but this does not guarantee their survival.

At the Microcredit Summit Meeting of Councils (New York, June 1998), a keynote speaker presented the successes of a microcredit program she runs in Chicago. However when running a small discussion group, she expressed grave reservations about the appropriateness of microcredit for the poorest of the poor, and spoke of the crisis they are plunged into if their business fails, leading to the repossession of their few worldly goods, and to their subsequent stigmatization as a bad credit risk. Another participant in this Meeting of Councils had formerly worked as a consultant for the UN in remote rural areas of Southeast Asia. She agreed with the keynote speaker's assessment: "Those concerned with their daily survival can't participate in microcredit schemes. We had much better success with those who were a little better off."

Another microcredit program in Asia tries to target the "poorest" by having every member of a community publicly list all of his or her possessions - and then asking the others to vote on whether the declaration was honest, and on just how poor the person is. Given that no one with any choice in the matter would want to be part of such a humiliating process, and given that community members might feel pressured to vote for their most powerful members to receive credit, as opposed to selecting the poorest, it is hard to fathom how such a process can actually help credit to reach the poorest with any accuracy or dignity.

It is true and laudable that many microcredit schemes enable poor people to change their destiny for the better. But we must stress how crucial it is to remain aware of its limits while continuing to seek additional measures to eradicate poverty.

B) Cultural Development. Such measures must include awareness of the importance of cultural development. We welcome the General Assembly's Second Committee draft resolution on Cultural Development (A/C.2/53/L.35). This resolution notes the Intergovernmental Conference on Cultural Policies for Development, held in Stockholm from 30 March to 2 April 1998. However it fails to voice the hope formulated in that conference's Plan of Action that the International Decade for the Eradication of Poverty (1997-2006) will include a year "devoted to the connections between culture and development and the elimination of poverty" (point 8).

The UNICEF publication, Reaching the Poorest, stresses the importance of culture, as does the UNESCO-NGO publication *Culture and Development: "Culture, a Way to Fight Extreme Poverty"*.[3] This latter publication demonstrates how cultural projects make it possible to get to know the very poor without defining them through their difficulties ("the illiterate, the undernourished..."). This builds a relationship where the very poor are more likely to feel recognized as human beings, and then to involve themselves in taking initiatives. One example included in this NGO-UNESCO publication is of a teenager in Latin America who scavenges in a garbage dump for survival - and yet who took the initiative of involving younger children in an art and reading activity taking place regularly at the dump.

Art, music or poetry can begin as a respite from the intolerable and from violence. Fourth World volunteer-worker Martine Hosselet offers very poor adults the opportunity to paint. She writes, *"Many young people tell us that they started to lose their balance, to get tough, because they felt apart, like outsiders. How else than with fists or tears can people speak of the beauty to which*

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[3] UNESCO Section of the Cultural Dimension of Development, World Decade for Cultural Development, 1988-1997, CLT-97/WS/8, Paris, 1997, 109. (The French edition was published by Editions Presence Africaine, 1997. ISBN 2-7087-0636-5)

they aspire, the peace and calm which people need in order to live? All people, and more than anyone else those living in the most extreme poverty, need beauty and poetry just as much as they need bread. Not before and not after bread. At the same time. Every man and woman needs beauty and creative expression at the same time as they need food in order to maintain their dignity, to maintain within themselves this space of freedom where one can invent the future, and without which one might as well be dead."

Because the very poor must devote all their energies to survival, they are often unable to preserve their culture or their history. This leads to them being seen as ignorant. Cultural development can thus provide a way to build on the richness of people's history, and to safeguard this history against the oblivion that threatens the very poorest so severely that they are often forced to leave their loved ones in unmarked gravesites, or even to break off contact with their children, severing the thread of family memory.

When the very poor are given access to culture, they can show the value of their experiences, first to themselves, and then to other members of their community. They can use it to build a bridge of communication to reach the society that has progressed without them. Fourth World volunteer-worker Regis De Muylder, who has run a cultural project in Central America on the edge of an enormous garbage dump where many children and adults work scavenging for anything that can be washed and resold. *"We met very deprived families who have been driven away from everywhere else. We planned to set up a street library there [with books and art material for children]. A man told me, 'We don't want any books here. We have to fight just to feed ourselves. Children are dying of hunger. If you show books to the children, you will melt their hearts.' The activity happened nevertheless. And in the end, this man took a coin from his pocket and offered it to me. He said, 'Here, this is for the bus ride. You are doing a good thing. People do not live on bread alone.' [...] Because culture is an exercise in creation, it allows each person to place themselves on a par with all others. Some people are so poor that their final means of protection is to get themselves forgotten. Culture breaches this imprisonment. On the one hand it is necessary for culture to penetrate into very poor environments. And on the other hand culture must allow itself to be impregnated with the experience of the very poor, with their suffering, hopes and courage."*

3) In Conclusion

We recommend that this Commission:

- Pay particular attention, in considering "Social Services for All," to the methods by which these services truly can reach all people, especially those who need them most, in ways that respect family ties.
- Prepare the Review of the Implementation of the Outcome of the social summit with an agenda that gives ample weight to cultural development.
- Urge the General Assembly to follow the suggestion in the Stockholm Plan of Action that the International Decade for the Eradication of Poverty (1997-2006) include a year devoted to the links between culture and development and the eradication of poverty.